



LELA HUBBARD, LMSW, received her master's degree from Jackson State University School of Social Work in 1998, and continued to work in both Behavioral Health and Family Services. From 2006-2020, she worked as a mitigation specialist in the MS Office of Capital Defense. Andre DeGruy took a chance by hiring Lela who had no experience as a Mitigation Specialist but a desire to learn and zeal for saving a person's life. As a result, Lela was mentored by Melanie Carr through the original mitigation mentoring program run by the ACLU Capital Punishment Project. As early as 2010, Lela crossed paths with Scharlette Holdman, who helped her with her first capital trial. Scharlette instilled in Lela not to look at the diagnosis, but what caused the diagnosis. This perspective has helped Lela and the teams she have worked with save numerous lives.

Lela is a nationally certified Defense Victim Outreach (DVO) specialist who has assisted victims' family members through capital trials and appeals as well as juvenile re-sentencing proceedings. Shortly before the pandemic in 2020, she took a leap of faith and went into private practice (Donelson Enterprises), focusing on federal capital trials, re-entry support for exonerees and long-termers, as well as DVO work across the United States. Lela has served as faculty at both local and national training conferences. Lela's goal is to expand reentry services in Mississippi and increase the number of social workers of color involved in mitigation. Lastly, but not least, Lela was chosen as the recipient of the 2021 Muhammed-White Award for her excellence in mitigation over the course of her career.